

**"Young Bob" La Follette: a Biography of Robert M. La Follette, Jr. ,
1895-1953**

ISSN 0003-4827

No known copyright restrictions.

Recommended Citation

"'Young Bob' La Follette: a Biography of Robert M. La Follette, Jr. , 1895-1953." *The Annals of Iowa* 45 (1981), 585-586.

Available at: <https://doi.org/10.17077/0003-4827.8763>

Hosted by [Iowa Research Online](#)

Book Reviews

"Young Bob". La Follette: A Biography of Robert M. La Follette, Jr., 1895-1953, by Patrick J. Maney. Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 1978. pp. 338. Notes, bibliographical note, index. \$18.00.

The La Follette family of Wisconsin is renowned in twentieth-century American reform. Robert M. La Follette, Sr. served as a reform governor of Wisconsin and United States senator, while son Robert, Jr. was a United States senator and son Phil was a governor of Wisconsin. Maney's biography of Robert M. La Follette, Jr., known as "Young Bob," is a most welcome addition to the historical literature on the illustrious family. Previous works by Edward N. Doan on the younger La Follette's senate career and by Roger T. Johnson on his involvement in the Progressive party in Wisconsin were both published before the vast family papers were opened in 1970 to historical researchers. Maney, who completed his graduate work at the University of Maryland, relies extensively on the vast family collection in furnishing the first full-scale biography of "Young Bob" La Follette.

Maney provides a skillful, balanced, well-organized biography of a very complex personality. "Young Bob" is pictured as intelligent, energetic, hard-working, friendly, and as less political minded than his famous father. There are interesting sections contrasting "Young Bob" with his father, describing his sometimes strained relationship with his brother Phil, and assessing his changing status with President Franklin D. Roosevelt. Maney ably traces "Young Bob's" first exposure to politics, his days as a mediocre student at the University of Wisconsin, his work as a loyal secretary and chief assistant to his father, his accomplishments as a United States senator, and his unhappy final years.

La Follette's role as a United States senator is featured. He was a superior senator, with weaknesses as a political leader. Upon his father's death in 1925, "Young Bob" reluctantly consented to seek the vacant Senate position. For the first few years, he pursued a course that he thought his father would have taken. During the Depression, however, he showed more political independence in applying his father's progressive principles to urban problems. Besides advocating tax reforms, he championed legislation authorizing federal relief for the unemployed and extensive expansion of public works. Maney highlights La Follette's role from 1936 to 1940 as chairman of the Senate Civil Liberties Committee. La Follette gradually shifted attention to foreign affairs, changing from an isolationist before Pearl Harbor to a cautious internationalist thereafter. He played a major role in the adoption of the Legislative Reorganization Act of 1946, but neglected Wisconsin affairs

THE ANNALS OF IOWA

in the process and consequently lost the senatorial election the same year to Joseph R. McCarthy.

This book, although not differing strikingly from previous interpretations, is stimulating, cogently presented, well-documented, and informative. Maney utilizes a wide variety of sources, employing the La Follette and other manuscript collections, interviews, government publications, newspapers, periodicals, and pertinent secondary sources. This reviewer particularly found it interesting that La Follette confronted repeated illnesses, enjoyed politics very little, opposed the red menace in the 1946 campaign more than did McCarty, and had such strained relations with his brother Phil.

Maney might have devoted more attention to La Follette's years before and after he served in the Senate and to his significant role on foreign policy before the outbreak of World War II. Other major senatorial collections, such as the vast Hiram W. Johnson Papers at the University of California, Berkeley may have furnished additional insight on La Follette's role in the isolationist bloc.

This book, however, is a very fine biography and should be read by those interested in American political, economic, and social history from 1925 to 1946 and particularly by those studying either the United States Senate or Wisconsin politics. Scholars will find the bibliographical note especially valuable.

David L. Porter
William Penn College
Oskaloosa, IA

Insurance Reform: Consumer Action in the Progressive Era, by H. Roger Grant. Ames: Iowa State University Press, 1979. pp. xi, 202. Cartoons, photographs, endnotes, index. \$14.95.

H. Roger Grant, associate professor of history at the University of Akron, coeditor of *Years of Struggle: The Farm Diary of Elmer G. Powers, 1931-1936* (Iowa State University Press, 1976), coauthor of *The Country Railroad Station in America* (Pruett Publishing Company, 1978), and author of more than fifty other scholarly articles and book chapters, now presents a carefully detailed study of a subject which historians have heretofore given little consideration. Grant's *Insurance Reform* is the first work of any kind to give an in-depth analysis of the effects of American consumerism on the nation's insur-

Copyright of *Annals of Iowa* is the property of State of Iowa, by & through the State Historical Society of Iowa and its content may not be copied or emailed to multiple sites or posted to a listserv without the copyright holder's express written permission. However, users may print, download, or email articles for individual use.